

# Dr. Beverly Ford on the integral element of case management

An interview with Sue Snider, Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council



Photo by Shirley Derbis, Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council

**B**everly O. Ford, Ph.D., is president of ASM Associates, a training and consulting firm that specializes in training human-services professionals in case management, welfare reform and client empowerment. Dr. Ford's workshops are informal, interactive sessions focusing on practical concepts and strategies staff can easily transfer into their everyday work. The author of *Making Case Management Work* ([www.asm-associates.com](http://www.asm-associates.com)), Dr. Ford was a special presenter at the 2010 PAACE Conference on Adult Education. Here, she provides an overview of case management in adult education programs for *ABLE in Context* readers.

**Q What is the purpose and function of case management in an adult education program that is focused on transition to jobs, postsecondary education or training?**

**A** Case management is a change process designed to help adult learners manage the changes in their lives needed to successfully complete their education and transition to employment. Throughout the change process, good case management partners with students to conduct a comprehensive assessment of where they are, set goals and develop action plans, find the resources needed to support their plan and provide encouragement and support.

**Q Why is case management an integral element of an adult education program?**

**A** Adult learners often face significant nonacademic challenges to success: balancing family and school, lack of confidence in their ability to handle academic work, limited resources, etc. Good case management provides a supportive partner who helps them recognize their strengths and not just their barriers, cheers each

small success, keeps the problems from seeming insurmountable and is there when they fail, to help them pick up and start again.

**Q What are the most important qualities of an effective case manager?**

**A** First, respect for the people they work with—understanding that their students are regular human beings like themselves, appreciation for their strengths and not just their barriers, and a belief in their ability to take more control of their lives. Second, flexibility—a willingness to try a variety of strategies and techniques to determine what is most effective. Third, willingness to grow and learn—to learn from the students and not just teach them, to continually ask questions without having all the answers, to move out of their comfort zones to try the unknown.

**Q Why is it critical for the student to be engaged in the case management process?**

**A** We do not control outcomes. Students do. Successful outcomes are difficult to achieve with our efforts alone. We should promote the active engagement of their strengths, knowledge and resources to partner with ours to achieve both student goals and our program outcomes.

**Q We know that self-sufficiency is the goal for our adult learners. What does a case manager need to do in order to develop a student's self-sufficiency?**

**A** Effective case managers do not do for students what they can and should do for themselves. They engage the adult learner as the lead partner to develop plans, find resources and solve problems. The case manager is the backup partner who adds ideas and

suggestions to the student's efforts.

**Q How can adult education programs that provide support through case management help ensure a seamless transition to work or postsecondary education for their adult learners?**

**A** Throughout the process we should continually make the connection between school and work—school as a means of improving employment prospects. Some practical suggestions:

- Include job-readiness activities in the curriculum—résumé preparation, completing applications and interview skills.
- Have students visit postsecondary institutions to meet with admissions and financial aid counselors, visit classes and see people like themselves enrolled in higher education.
- Invite area employers to talk to students about their education requirements for hiring new people.

**Q In order to track success, what is involved in the follow-up process with students?**

**A** Follow-up should do more than track student progress. It should attempt to have an impact on their progress. Effective case managers identify what is working before tackling problems. They reinforce student motivators and strengths and partner with students to revise and modify plans and to solve problems interfering with success. ■